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GUNFLASH

IN 1943, AS THE ALLIES CLAWED THEIR WAY UP THE BONY SPINE OF ITALY, THE GUNS OF THE ROYAL ARTILLERY WERE DESPERATELY NEEDED TO DISLODGE THE GERMANS GRIMLY CLINGING TO THE HILLS. ONCE AGAIN IN ITS HISTORY, THE REGIMENT LIVED UP TO ITS PROUD MOTTO 'UBIQUE', MEANING 'EVERYWHERE'...



Chapter 1. *The Farm*

EARLY ONE MORNING, A GRIM-FACED GROUP OF MEN CROUCHED ON THE EDGE OF A TINY ITALIAN HILLSIDE FARM. TOUGHENED FROM MONTHS OF HARD FIGHTING, THEY STARED AT THE LIFELESS SCENE BELOW WITH SUSPICION...



CAUTIOUSLY, LIEUTENANT MERSHAM LED HIS MEN INTO THE VALLEY, HIS TENSE NERVES WARNING HIM OF A MOUNTING, UNKNOWN DANGER...



MERSHAM SHOOK HIS HEAD. IT WAS TOO RISKY TO RUSH BLINDLY INTO THE PLACE. BUT THE LIEUTENANT AND THE SERGEANT WERE NOT THE ONLY TWO TO SENSE THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG ABOUT THE FARM...

KEEP DOWN,
SIGNALLER!

SORRY,
SARGE

THIS
PLACE
IS GIVING
ME THE
CREEPS!



THE UNEASY SILENCE TORE AT THE NERVES OF THE ENTIRE PATROL. BUT NONE SUFFERED AS MUCH AS GUNNER-SIGNALLER TOM PRENTICE, A YOUNGSTER WITH AN OVER-ACTIVE IMAGINATION...

THIS PLACE COULD
BE A TRAP. SOME
JERRY MIGHT HAVE
ME IN HIS SIGHTS
RIGHT NOW. I'D
BETTER STICK
CLOSE TO THE
SERGEANT...



WITH A FINAL, SHORT RUSH, THE PATROL REACHED THE FARM, FINGERS TENSE ON TRIGGERS AS THEY CHECKED THE SILENT BUILDINGS...

CLARKE! THOMPSON! JONES! CHECK THE BARN! THE REST OF YOU, SPREAD OUT AND BE CAREFUL!

LEAVE IT TO US, SARGE!

MAYBE WE CAN FIND SOMETHING TO EAT!



WITH TOM BY HIS SIDE, THE BIG SERGEANT REACHED THE FARMHOUSE. THE DOOR SLAMMED OPEN AT A SAVAGE KICK FROM HIS BOOT...

EMPTY!
WHERE IS
EVERYONE?

LOOK AT
THAT FOOD!
IT LOOKS AS
IF THEY LEFT
IN THE
MIDDLE OF A
MEAL!



TIRE D AND HUNGRY, THE FOOD LOOKED APPETISING TO THE YOUNG SIGNALLER. IMPULSIVELY, HE REACHED TOWARDS A SLAB OF RICH CHEESE...

STAY
HERE,
PRENTICE.
I'M GOING
TO CHECK
UPSTAIRS.

DON'T
TOUCH THAT
FOOD, YOU
IDIOT!

WHAT?
I...I...
ONLY...



CURTLY, MERSHAM CUT SHORT THE STAMMERED EXPLANATION. EYES NARROWED, HE SNATCHED THE RIFLE AND BAYONET FROM TOM...

NO ITALIAN
FARMER WOULD
LEAVE HIS PLACE
LIKE THIS. MY
GUESS IS THE
WHOLE PLACE
IS BOOBY
TRAPPED!



CAREFULLY, MERSHAM SLID THE POINT OF THE BAYONET BENEATH THE CHEESE. THEN, DUCKING LOW, HE JERKED DOWN ON THE BUTT OF THE RIFLE. AN EARSPLITTING ROAR HALF-DEAFENED THE THREE MEN...

THE CUNNING PERISHERS! CONTACT FUSES AND ENOUGH EXPLOSIVE TO MAIM A MAN FOR LIFE!

TH...
THANKS,
SIR. YOU...
SAVED MY
LIFE!

JUST
BE MORE
CAREFUL
THE NEXT
TIME. WE'D
BETTER WARN
THE OTHERS,
FAST...



BUT FOR SOME OF THE PATROL, THE WARNING CAME TOO LATE. VICIOUS EXPLOSIONS BLASTED SPITEFULLY, AS THE HIDDEN EXPLOSIVES TOOK THEIR TERRIBLE TOLL...

ARGH!



HIGH ON THE HILL OVERLOOKING THE VALLEY, A GERMAN OFFICER SMILED AS THE SOUND OF EXPLOSIONS ECHOED THROUGH THE AIR...

HEAR THAT, FELDWEBEL?
THE ENGLANDERS HAVE
WALKED RIGHT INTO
OUR LITTLE TRAP!

JA, HERR
OBERLEUTNANT.
SHALL WE OPEN
FIRE NOW?



IMPATIENT AFTER LONG HOURS OF WAITING, THE FELDWEBEL WAS EAGER FOR ACTION. BUT THE OFFICER HAD OTHER PLANS IN MIND...

WE SHALL WAIT FOR A
BETTER TARGET. LET
THE OTHER GROUPS
KNOW THEY MUST
WAIT FOR MY
SIGNAL.

JAWOHL, HERR
OBERLEUTNANT.
WE ARE ZEROED
IN ON THE FARM.
THE ENGLANDERS
WILL NOT STAND
A CHANCE.



UNAWARE OF THE WATCHFUL THREAT FROM THE HILLS, THE PATROL FINISHED THE PERILOUS TASK OF CLEARING THE BOOBY TRAPS FROM THE FARM...

THE PLACE IS ALL CLEAR NOW, SIR. WE'VE THREE CASUALTIES - TWO SERIOUS, ONE DEAD!

PUT THE WOUNDED IN THE BARN UNTIL WE CAN SEND THEM BACK. WHERE'S THAT SIGNALLER?

HERE, SIR!



WITH THE AREA CLEARED, THE FOLLOW-UP DETACHMENT OF 'B' BATTERY COULD ADVANCE AND TAKE OVER. BUT EVEN AS TOM CONTACTED THE UNIT, A FROWN CREASED THE LIEUTENANT'S FOREHEAD...

I'M STILL NOT HAPPY ABOUT THIS PLACE, SERGEANT. I'VE THE FEELING WE'RE BEING WATCHED!

THERE ARE NO ANIMALS, MAYBE THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT SEEM STRANGE, SIR. A FARM SHOULD HAVE ANIMALS.



MERSHAM GRUNTED, STILL NOT SATISFIED. TILTING HIS HEAD, HE STARED UP AT THE WIND-TOWER AND CAME TO A SUDDEN DECISION...

WE'D BETTER SET UP AN OBSERVATION POST. CLIMB THAT TOWER, PRENTICE. IF YOU SPOT ANYTHING, RADIO BACK AND STOP THE UNIT.

RIGHT, SIR.



THE TOWER WAS OLD, THE METAL RUSTED, AND THE WHOLE CONSTRUCTION SWAYED BENEATH THE WEIGHT OF THE YOUNG SIGNALLER...

ALL RIGHT, PRENTICE?

I CAN MANAGE, SIR!

HE'S A GOOD LAD, SIR. I JUST WISH HE'D STOP RELYING ON OTHER PEOPLE AS MUCH AS HE DOES



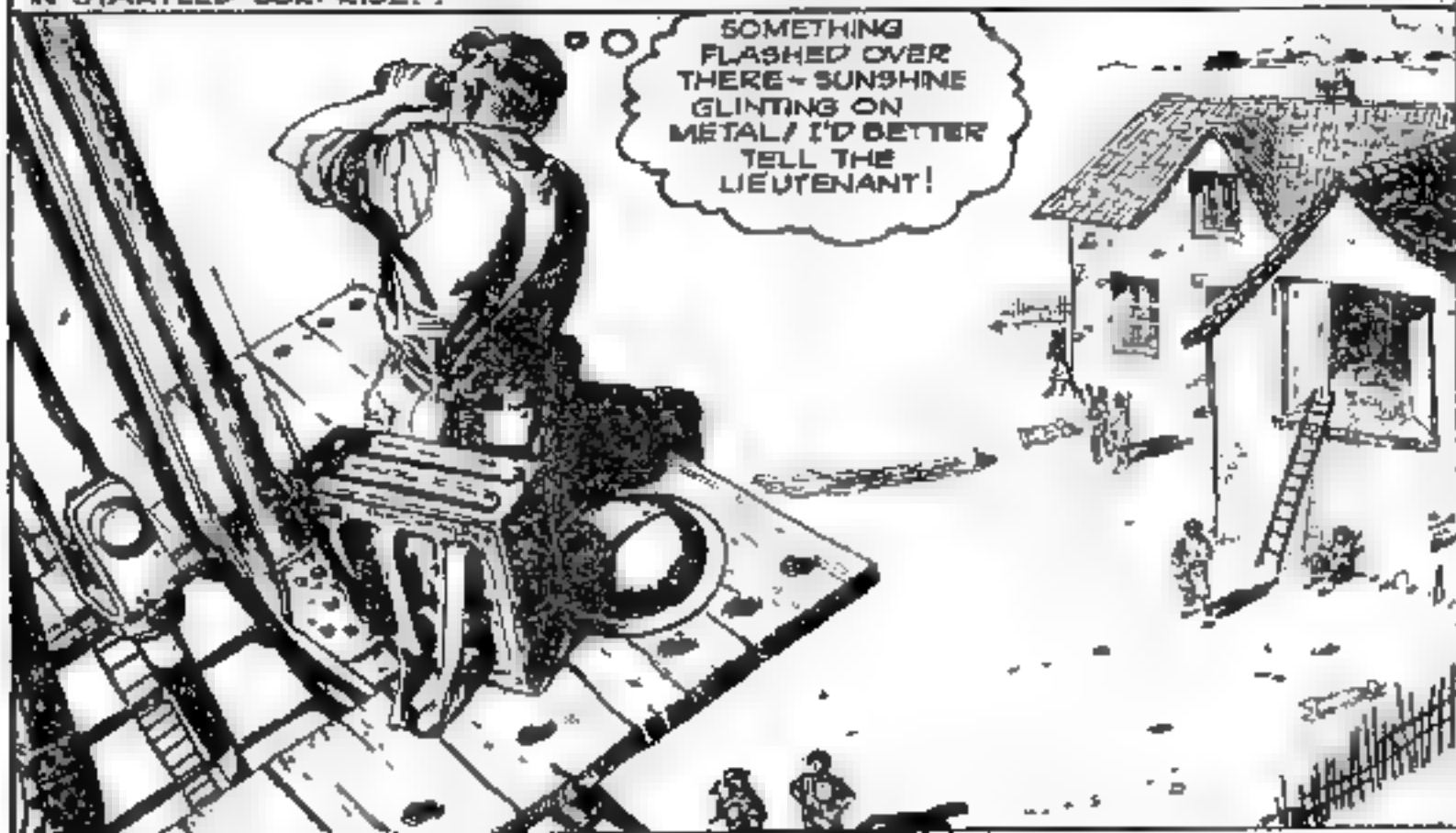
BACK IN THE HILLS, THE FOLLOW-UP DETACHMENT OF 'B' BATTERY SWUNG INTO ACTION, THE WHEELS OF THEIR VEHICLES CHURNING THE DUSTY SOIL AS THEY LABOURED TOWARDS THE FARM...

LET'S HOPE THE RECCE OUTFIT HAS FOUND US A DECENT PLACE THIS TIME.

SIGNALS TOLD ME IT WAS A FARM. MIGHT BE SOME GOOD GRUB FOR A CHANGE.



PERCHED AT THE TOP OF THE TOWER, TOM GRINNED AS HE SPOTTED THE PLUME OF DUST FROM THE FOLLOW-UP TRANSPORT IN THE REAR. THEN, AS HE TURNED, HE STIFFENED IN STARTLED SURPRISE.



OBERLEUTNANT KARL SCHLOSSMANN GRITTED HIS TEETH AS HE SAW THE TINY FIGURE ON THE TOWER SIGNAL TO THOSE BELOW.



FACE GRIM, PANTING FROM THE EXERTION. MERSHAM CLIMBED TO THE TOP OF THE TOWER, ALL TOO CONSCIOUS OF THE UNSUSPECTING COLUMN APPROACHING THE FARM...



WE CAN'T
TAKE CHANCES.
RADIO THE
FOLLOW-UP UNIT.
TELL THEM TO
HALT AND
SCATTER!

YES, SIR.
RIGHT
AWAY!

DESPERATELY, TOM TRIED TO MAKE CONTACT, THEN HELPLESSLY SHOOK HIS HEAD. MERSHAM, FACE PALE BENEATH HIS TAN, LOOKED HELPLESSLY AT THE COLUMN, HEADING TOWARDS THEM...

I CAN'T RAISE
THEM, SIR. SHALL
I GET THROUGH
TO THE
BATTERY?

YES, GET
THROUGH AND
TELL THEM TO
STAND BY. WE
MAY NEED
THEIR
SUPPORT!



EVEN AS HE SPOKE, THE GERMANS SPRANG INTO ACTION. SCHLOSSMANN GAVE THE LONG-AWAITED ORDER TO FIRE.

WE WILL BLAST
THE FARM OFF
THE FACE OF THE
EARTH—AND THE
ENGLANDERS
WITH IT! ALL
UNITS—
FEUER!



THE MORTARS OPENED UP, THEIR SQUAT PROJECTILES SOARING IN HIGH ARCS TOWARDS THE MEN CLUSTERED AROUND THE FARM...

GET THOSE
MORTARS FIRING
AT TOP SPEED!
I WANT THREE
SHELLS IN THE
AIR FROM
EACH WEAPON
AT ONCE!

JA,
FELDWEBEL.

WUNDERBAR!
RIGHT ON
TARGET!



MERSHAM'S SHOUT OF WARNING WAS LOST IN THE SUDDEN FURY AS THE STEEL CONTAINERS OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE FLOWED INTO CRIMSON DESTRUCTION...



SICK WITH HORROR, MERSHAM FORCED HIMSELF TO REMAIN CALM. SNATCHING HIS MAPS, HE RAPPED A STRING OF ORDERS AT THE YOUNG SIGNALLER...



FAR BACK IN THE HILLS, A GUNNER JERKED A LANYARD AND SENT A TWENTY-FIVE POUND SHELL SCREAMING INTO THE DISTANCE



STEP
LIVELY,
THERE 'RELOAD
-WE HAVEN'T
GOT ALL
DAY!

W SH
I'D LOVED
THE
INF ANTRY,
MATE!

THE SCREAM OF THE SHELL SLASHED ACROSS THE COUGHING ROAR OF THE MORTAR BOMBS, AND A FLOWER OF SMOKE AND FLAME BLOSSOMED ON THE ENEMY SLOPE...



COR!
WHAT WAS
THAT?

THE LIEUTENANT'S
CALLING UP
SUPPORT-FIRE FROM
THE BATTERY. A
FEW SHELLS WILL
SOFTEN UP THE
JERRIES!

LET'S
HOPE THEIR
ARM'S GOOD
THE JERRIES
ARE A BIT
TOO CLOSE TO
OUR POSITION
FOR MY
LIKING!

PINNED DOWN BY THE MURDEROUS MORTAR BARRAGE, THE GUNNERS' PATROL WAS SUFFERING HEAVY CASUALTIES AGAIN A RANGING SHELL SCREAMED ACROSS THE HILLS.

CORRECT A HUNDRED
YARDS TO THE LEFT
AND FIFTY DOWN
FULL SALVO!

RIGHT,
SIR!



TOM'S ADMIRATION FOR THE OFFICER INCREASED AS SHELLS RAINED DOWN ON THE GERMAN MORTAR CREWS. IT WAS SUPERB FIRE-DIRECTION AT EXTREME RANGE...

THEY HAVE PIN-POINTED US,
HERR OBERLEUTNANT.
SHALL WE MOVE?

NO-KEEP
FIRING!

THEY
WILL BLOW
US TO
PIECES!

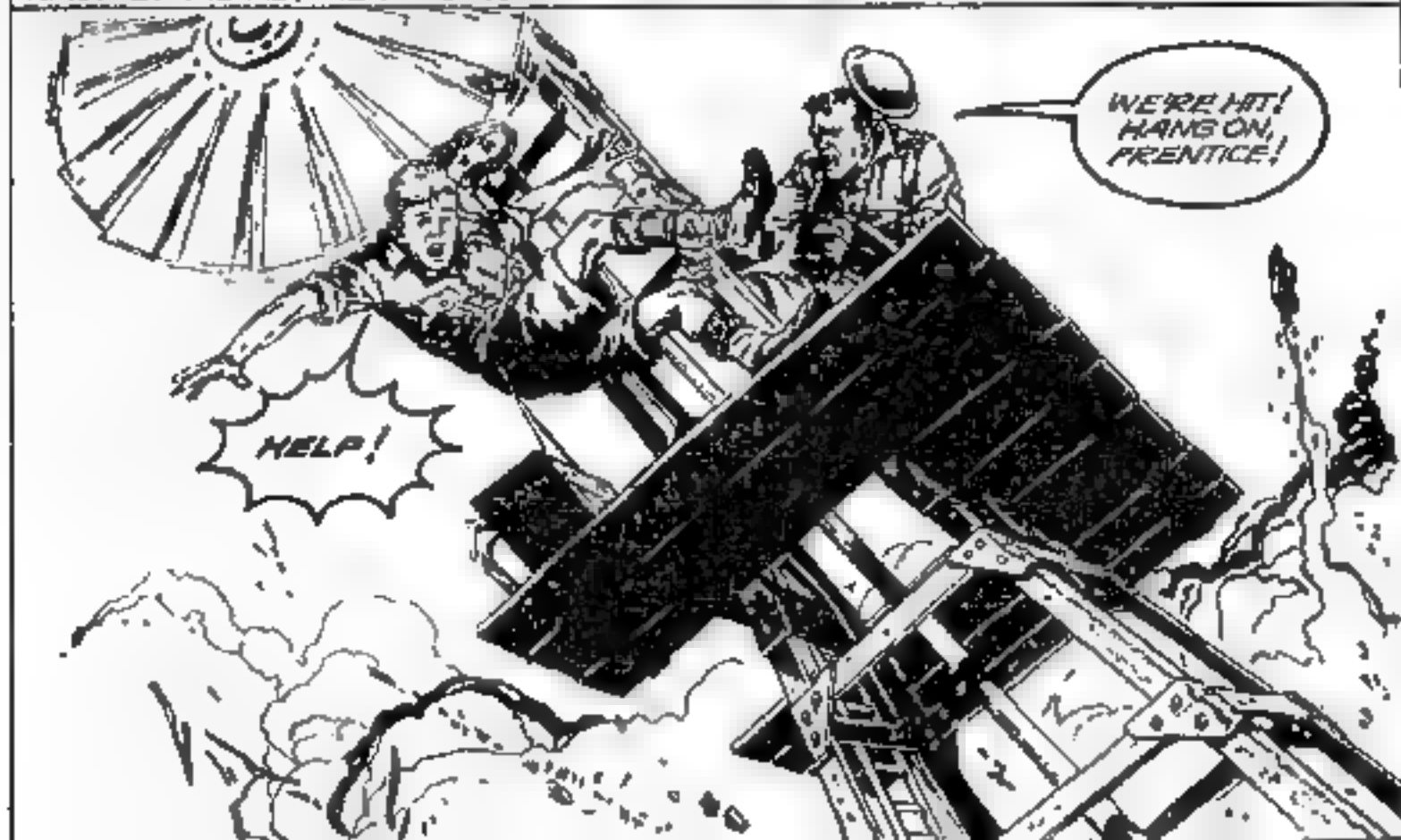


SHAKING WITH RAGE, SCHLOSSMANN GLARED AT THE SLENDER TOWER WITHOUT THEIR OBSERVATION POST, THE ENGLISH GUNS WOULD BE BLIND AND USELESS...

WE ARE NOT YET DEFEATED. MORTARS THREE AND FIVE, AIM AT THAT TOWER! BRING IT DOWN AND THE ENGLANDERS ARE HELPLESS!



TWICE, HEAVY EXPLOSIONS SHOOK THE SLENDER TOWER THEN, WITH A SUDDEN RASP OF METAL, THE STRUCTURE TILTED. TOM PRENTICE FELT HIMSELF FALLING.



HELP!

WE'RE HIT!
HANG ON,
PRENTICE!

SUDDENLY, TOM JARRED TO A HALT, HIS ANKLE TRAPPED IN THE ANGLE OF TWO STRUTS, THE WHIRLING STEEL VANES INCHES FROM HIS HEAD...

DON'T
MOVE,
PRENTICE!

I CAN'T
MOVE! IF I
SLIP I'LL BE
CUT TO PIECES
IN THE
VANES!

FORCING HIMSELF TO RELAX, TOM FELT HIS LEG GRABBED AND LIFTED AWAY FROM THE WHISPERING BLADES...

GRAB
HOLD OF
SOMETHING,
QUICK! I CAN'T
HOLD YOUR
WEIGHT FOR
LONG!

ALL
RIGHT, SIR.
I'VE GOT
IT!

Chapter 2. *The Tables Turned*

BACK ON THE GROUND MERSHAM AND PRENTICE RAN THE GAUNTLET OF THE MORTAR FIRE AND JOINED SERGEANT THORN WHERE HE WAITED WITH HIS MEN...



MERSHAM NODDED WITH CURT SATISFACTION, BUT HIS VOICE WAS GRIM AS HE RAPPED TERSE ORDERS. TO SUCCEED, HIS ATTACK HAD TO BE TIMED TO THE SPILT-SECOND.

THE BATTERY'S
READY, SIR!

GOOD! FIRST
SALVO IN EXACTLY
TWO MINUTES. THE
SECOND FIVE MINUTES
AFTER THAT WE
ADVANCE AS SOON AS
THE FIRST SALVO
FALLS. UNDERSTOOD,
SERGEANT?

YES,
SIR!



TENSELY, THEY WAITED AS THE SECONDS CRAWLED PAST, THEN, AS THE FIRST SALVO SMASHED INTO THE HILL, THE GRIM-FACED GUNNERS RACED FORWARD...



HEARTS POUNDING, BREATH RASPING, THEY FLUNG THEMSELVES TOWARDS THE ENEMY, EVERY MOMENT EXPECTING TO BE CAUGHT IN A SCYTHING HAIL OF LEAD...



ALTHOUGH NUMBED AND SHAKEN BY THE FURY OF THE SALVO, MOST OF THE GERMANS HAD SURVIVED. COLDLY, SCHLOSSMANN WATCHED THE ADVANCING GUNNERS, HIS THIN LIPS CURVED IN A CONTEMPTUOUS SNEER...

WE CANNOT STAND ANOTHER SALVO, HERR OBERLEUTNANT. WOULD IT NOT BE BETTER TO DISPERSE?

DUMMKOPF! WOULD THEY BE ATTACKING INTO THE FIRE OF THEIR OWN GUNS? NO, THERE WILL BE NO MORE SHELLS..



THE ENGLANDERS ARE DESPERATE, FELDWEBEL, WE SHALL NOW DESTROY THEM. NOT ONE SHALL ESCAPE MY TRAP!

JA, HERR OBERLEUTNANT



RIFLES COCKED, MACHINE GUNS AND MORTARS READY. THE GERMANS WAITED FOR THEIR ATTACKERS...



FIRE AT THREE HUNDRED METRES, ERNST, AT THAT RANGE EVEN YOU CANNOT MISS!

MERSHAM HAD OTHER IDEAS, AS THE SECOND HAND OF HIS WATCH REACHED THE DEADLINE, HE SHOUTED A FRANTIC COMMAND..



THE GERMAN GUNS SNARLED INTO LIFE MERSHAM'S PATROL FLUNG THEMSELVES TO THE GROUND, AND THE SEARING HAIL OF LEAD FLASHED HARMLESSLY ABOVE THEM.

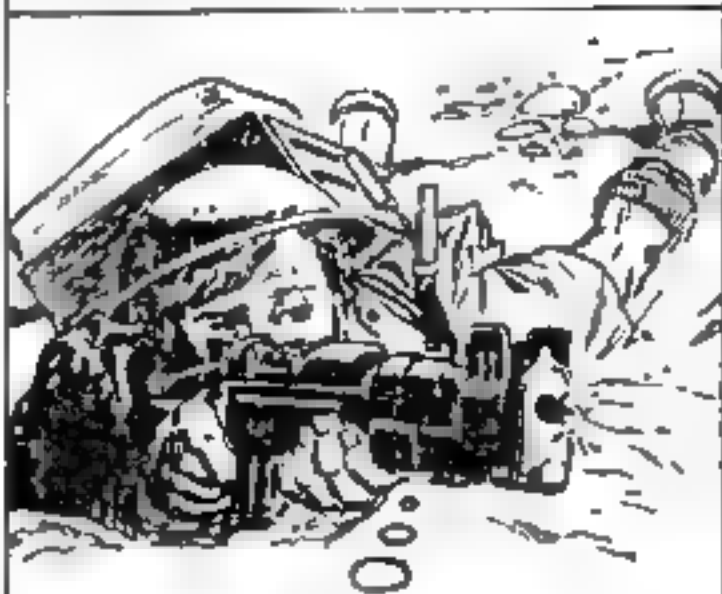


THORN SNARLED WITH IMPATIENCE AT TOM'S QUESTION...

WE FIGHT, YOU WEAK-KNEED NINNY! GET STUCK IN, FOR PETE'S SAKE, AND DON'T HANG AROUND WAITING FOR SOMEONE TO TELL YOU WHAT TO DO!



TOM FLUSHED THE SERGEANT'S WORDS HURT, FOR HE KNEW THEY WERE TRUE. HE ALWAYS NEEDED SOMEONE TO FOLLOW, A STRONGER PERSONALITY TO LEAN ON...



HE SHOULDN'T HAVE SAID THAT! IT'S JUST THAT I'VE A LOT TO LEARN! MERSHAM WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN LIKE THAT!

AT THAT MOMENT, MERSHAM WAS SICK WITH WORRY AGAIN AND AGAIN, HE GLANCED AT HIS WATCH, HOPING FOR THE SALVO WHICH COULD MEAN LIFE TO THEM ALL. IN THE MEANTIME, GERMAN MORTARS WERE CRASHING AMONG THEM...

WHERE'S THAT SECOND SALVO?

THOSE IDIOTS AT THE BATTERY SHOULD HAVE STARTED BY THIS TIME!

I'M HIT!



THEN, CUTTING OVER THE COUGH OF MORTARS AND THE SNARL OF SMALL ARMS, CAME THE SCREAMING WHINE OF A SALVO OF TWENTY-FIVE POUND SHELLS.



WITH MERCILESS ACCURACY, THE SHELLS EXPLODED IN A RIPPING HAIL OF SHRAPNEL AND SEARING FLAME, FLUNGING MEN AND MORTARS HIGH INTO THE AIR...



IN THE FOLLOWING SILENCE, THORN'S BULL ROAR JERKED THE GUNNERS TO THEIR FEET, EYES HARD, FACES SET IN THEIR GRIM DESIRE FOR REVENGE...



IN A YELLING WAVE OF FURY, THE GUNNERS SLAMMED INTO THE DISORGANISED GERMANS WHO DESPERATELY TRIED TO STAND THEIR GROUND.



THE BRITISH WAVE SWIFT FORWARD RELENTLESSLY,
UNTIL THE HILL ECHOED TO THE FURY OF GRIM,
HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT...

GO TO
SLEEP,
FRITZ!

NO YOU
DON'T,
JERRY!



HIS FACE SPLIT IN A SAVAGE SMILE, THE BIG
SERGEANT LUNGED FORWARD, EYES INTENT ONLY
ON THE HATED FIELD-GRAY UNIFORMS

WHERE'S THE
LIEUTENANT?
I'VE GOT TO FIND
HIM, HE MIGHT
NEED HELP!

COME ON
AND FIGHT
LIKE MEN, YOU
COWARDLY
BUNCH!



CARELESS OF HIS OWN SAFETY, TOM SCORNE GERMAN BULLETS, HIS EYES SEARCHING FOR THE MAN WHO HAD TWICE SAVED HIS LIFE...

THERE'S LIEUTENANT MERSHAM MAYBE I CAN GIVE HIM A HAND...



MERSHAM GRINNED AS THE GERMANS BROKE AND RAN UP THE HILL. VOICE CRACKING, HE YELLED TO HIS MEN...



AS HIS MEN RACED AFTER THE GERMANS, MERSHAM TURNED BACK TO THE MAIN POSITION. SUDDENLY HE HALTED, THE BLOOD DRAINING FROM HIS FACE AS A GRIM FIGURE STEPPED BEFORE HIM...

DROP YOUR GUN, ENGLANDER!

THIS WON'T DO YOU ANY GOOD—YOU'RE BEATEN! WHY DON'T YOU SURRENDER?



SICKLY, MERSHAM STARED AT THE GRIM MUZZLE OF SCHLOSSMANN'S SCHMEISSER, MUSCLES TENSED AGAINST THE DEADLY THREAT IT CARRIED...

IF YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME, GET ON WITH IT.

NOT SO FAST, ENGLANDER! FIRST, I WANT TO SEE YOU SHAKE WITH FEAR—YOU'RE NOT SO BRAVE NOW, HEIN?



NEITHER SAW TOM RUNNING TOWARDS THEM. FLINGING HIS RIFLE TO HIS SHOULDER, THE YOUNG SIGNALLER GAVE A GASP OF HORROR AS THE FIRING PIN FELL WITH A DULL CLICK ..



JERKING AT THE BOLT OF HIS RIFLE, TOM STARTED FORWARD, TERRIFIED THAT THE GERMAN WOULD FIRE WHILE HIS GUN WAS JAMMED...



WARNED BY THE SCRAPE OF BOOTED FEET, SCHLOSSMANN TURNED EYES NARROWED AGAINST THE GLARE OF THE SUN, FINGER CLOSING ON THE TRIGGER OF HIS SCHMEISSER



TOO LATE, SCHLOSSMANN SAW THE RIFLE POINTED AT HIS CHEST. EVEN AS HIS FINGER SQUEEZED THE TRIGGER, TOM'S RIFLE BARKED ANGRILY...



ON THE SLOPE, THE SNARL OF GUNS FADED AS THE GERMAN RESISTANCE WAS BROKEN TRIUMPHANTLY, THE GUNNERS MOPPED UP WHAT WAS LEFT OF THE OPPOSITION...



HE WAS
RUNNING
OVER THE
SLOPE WHEN
I SAW HIM
LAST,
SARGE.

ANGER DARKENED THE BIG SERGEANT'S FACE AS HE SEARCHED FOR TOM PRENTICE. FINDING HIM AT LAST, HE GAVE HIM THE ROUGH EDGE OF HIS TONGUE...



QUIETLY, THE DEUTENANT EXPLAINED WHAT HAD HAPPENED. THORN FROWNED, THEN SHOOK HIS HEAD STUBBORNLY...

I'M GLAD HE MANAGED TO SAVE YOU, SIR, BUT THAT ISN'T THE POINT. HIS PLACE WAS WITH THE OTHERS, NOT RUNNING AROUND LOOKING FOR HIS HERO...BES PARDON, SIR!

HERO? WHAT DO YOU MEAN, SERGEANT?



SERGEANT THORN KNEW WHAT HE WAS TALKING ABOUT CLOSER TO THE MEN THAN THE OFFICER, HE SPOKE FROM EXPERIENCE ...

PRENTICE NEEDS SOMEONE TO LEAN ON. YOU'VE SAVED HIS LIFE AND HE RESPECTS AND ADMIRES YOU. BUT HE'S A SOLDIER AND HE SHOULD DEPEND ON HIMSELF.

I SEE. WELL, I WON'T ENCOURAGE HIM. PERHAPS YOU CAN FIND SOME WAY TO SETTLE IT, SERGEANT.



TO THORN IT WAS EASY TO SETTLE. THE INTERMEDIATE SIGNALLER HAD BEEN KILLED DURING THE ATTACK, AND TOM WAS JUST THE MAN TO TAKE HIS PLACE ...

YOU'VE BEEN RELIEVED FROM RECCE DUTY, BUT DON'T THINK THIS IS AN EASY JOB. REMEMBER, THE LADS DEPEND ON YOU...

I KNOW THAT, SARGE!



Chapter 3. A Lost Message

TOM'S NEW JOB WAS TO ACT AS A RADIO-LINK BETWEEN THE RECCE PATROLS AND THE BATTERY. HE ALSO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL MESSAGES TO AND FROM BRIGADE H.Q.

ANYTHING INTERESTING COMING THROUGH, TOM?

JUST ROUTINE POSITIONING. WHY, ARE YOU EXPECTING A MESSAGE FROM HOME?



GRINNING, THE DRIVER SHOOK HIS HEAD. VOICE LOWERED, HE JERKED A THUMB TOWARDS THE FARMHOUSE, NOW USED AS AN ORDERLY ROOM...

JOE TELLS ME THAT OUR BUNCH OF JERRY PRISONERS HAS GOT H.Q. WORRIED WITH WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY I WONDERED IF ANYTHING WAS BREWING..

IT'S JUST ANOTHER RUMOUR..



AT THAT MOMENT, TOUGH, BEETLE-BROWED BRIGADIER WINSLADE COULD ONLY WISH THAT IT WAS BACK AT BRIGADE H.Q., HE STABBED A GNARLED FINGER AT A MAP AS WORRIED OFFICERS LISTENED TO THE HARSH RASP OF HIS VOICE...

INTELLIGENCE REPORT A HEAVY CONCENTRATION OF GERMANS HERE THIS PLACES SEVERAL OF OUR BATTERIES IN DANGER!



THE ENEMY MUST BE BEATEN BACK ALL RECCO PATROLS WILL STAND BY TO ENGAGE THE ENEMY ALL UNITS WILL BE KEPT POSTED AS TO THE SITUATION!



THE GERMAN ATTACK WAS A DESPERATE MOVE TO BREAK THE ALLIED ADVANCE IF THEY COULD CAPTURE THE BRITISH GUNS THEY COULD HOLD THE SECTOR OPEN FOR REINFORCEMENTS...

AT LAST WE ARE HEADING THE RIGHT WAY, HERE HAUPTMANN - FORWARD, NOT BACK.

YOU ARE YOUNG, KLAUS, AND EAGER.



HAUPTMANN BRAUN WAS TOO WISE IN THE WAYS OF WAR TO HAVE ANY ILLUSIONS. THE GERMAN ARMY WAS ENGAGED IN A GAMBLE AND HE KNEW IT...

WE WILL FORCE-MARCH OVER THE HILLS UNTIL WE ENGAGE THE ENEMY. THEN WE MUST HOLD THEM UNTIL THE REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVE ON THE LONGER ROUTE...

I UNDERSTAND, HERR HAUPTMANN.

BUT, DETERMINED AS THE GERMANS WERE, THEY FACED MEN STILL MORE RESOLUTE. HASTILY DESPATCHED UNITS MET THE GERMAN COLUMN IN SAVAGE CONFLICT...

I'M HIT!

KEEP FIRING!
AIM LOW
AND KEEP FIRING!

FORWARD!

GUNFIRE ECHOED SPITEFULLY FROM THE HILLS AS THE TWO SIDES CLASHED.



THE GERMAN ATTACK WAS SUCCESSFUL, BUT THEIR VICTORY WAS DEARLY BOUGHT...



AS COMBAT UNITS RUSHED TO ENGAGE THE ENEMY, THE GUNNERS OF 'B' BATTERY STRUGGLED TO MOVE THEIR GUNS OVER THE HARSH TERRAIN...

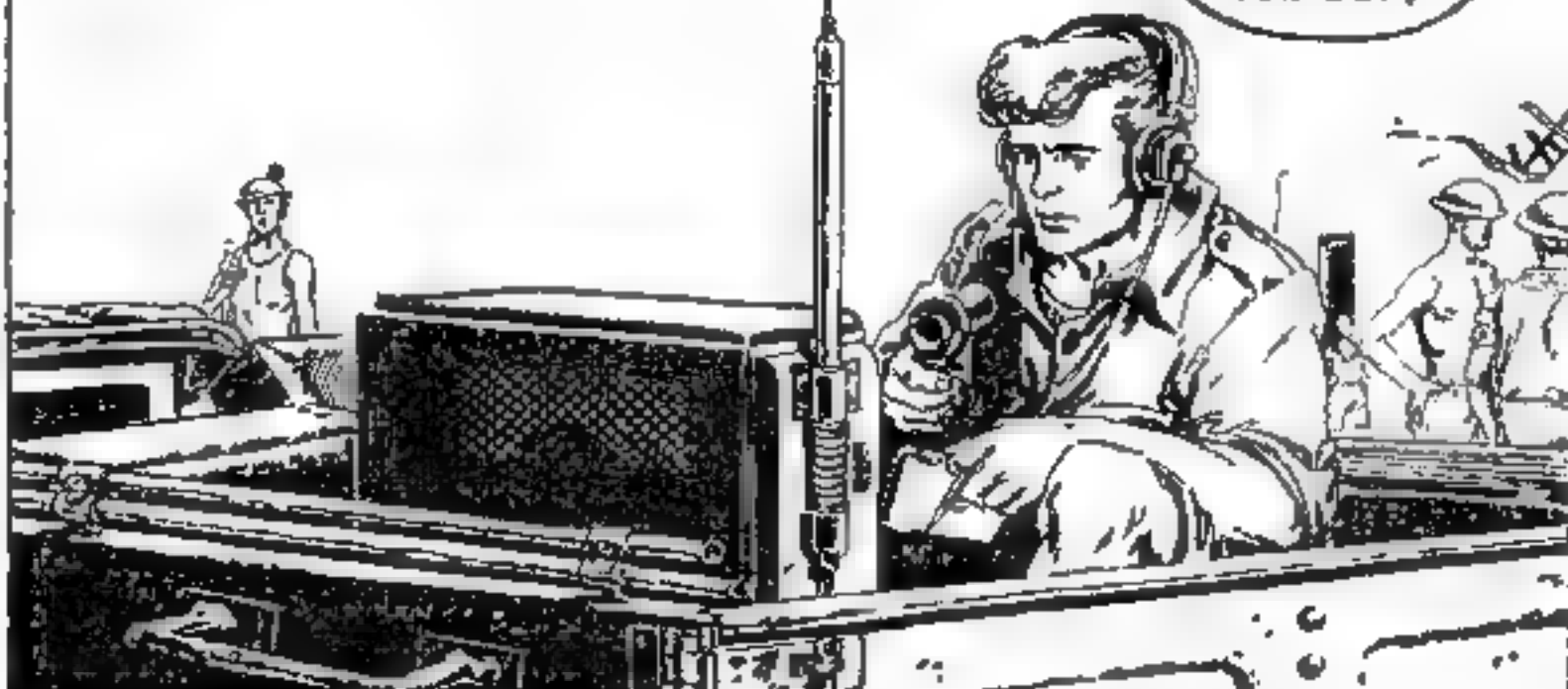


GRIMLY, THE GUNNERS CLAWED THEIR WAY TOWARDS THEIR ADVANCE UNIT WHERE THEIR GUNS WOULD DO THE MOST GOOD...



TOM PRENTICE WAS JUST RECEIVING ANOTHER MESSAGE AT THAT MOMENT. HIS FACE WHITENED AS HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE SIGNAL...

MESSAGE RECEIVED AND UNDERSTOOD. A- FOR-ABLE, OVER AND OUT!



NUMBLY, TOM STARED DOWN AT THE MESSAGE HE HAD SCRAWLED ON HIS PAD... THE MESSAGE HE WAS TO PASS ON TO LIEUTENANT MERSHAM'S PATROL.

SLOWLY, HE TORE THE MESSAGE FROM ITS PAD THE YOUNG SOLDIER'S MIND WAS IN A TURMOIL...

IT'S MURDER UP AT THE FRONT REPORTS SAY THE JERRIES ARE TEARING US TO PIECES NOW THEY WANT THE LIEUTENANT TO GO UP THERE -AND BE KILLED!



STRIDING PAST THE JEEP, MERSHAM PAUSED, LOOKING CURIOUSLY AT THE DRAWN FACE OF THE YOUNG SIGNALLER. TOM GULPED AS HE MET HIS EYES...

YOU LOOK ALL IN PRENTICE. NOTHING WRONG, I HOPE? IS THAT MESSAGE FOR ME?

IT'S, ER IT'S NOT A MESSAGE, SIR, I WAS JUST GETTING RID OF SOME OLD PAPER...



MERSHAM HESITATED FOR A SECOND, THEN WALKED ON. THE YOUNG SIGNALLER FELT A STRANGE SENSE OF GUILT AT HAVING LIED, BUT MINGLED WITH IT WAS A FEELING OF TRIUMPH THAT HE HAD SAVED MERSHAM FROM POSSIBLE DEATH...

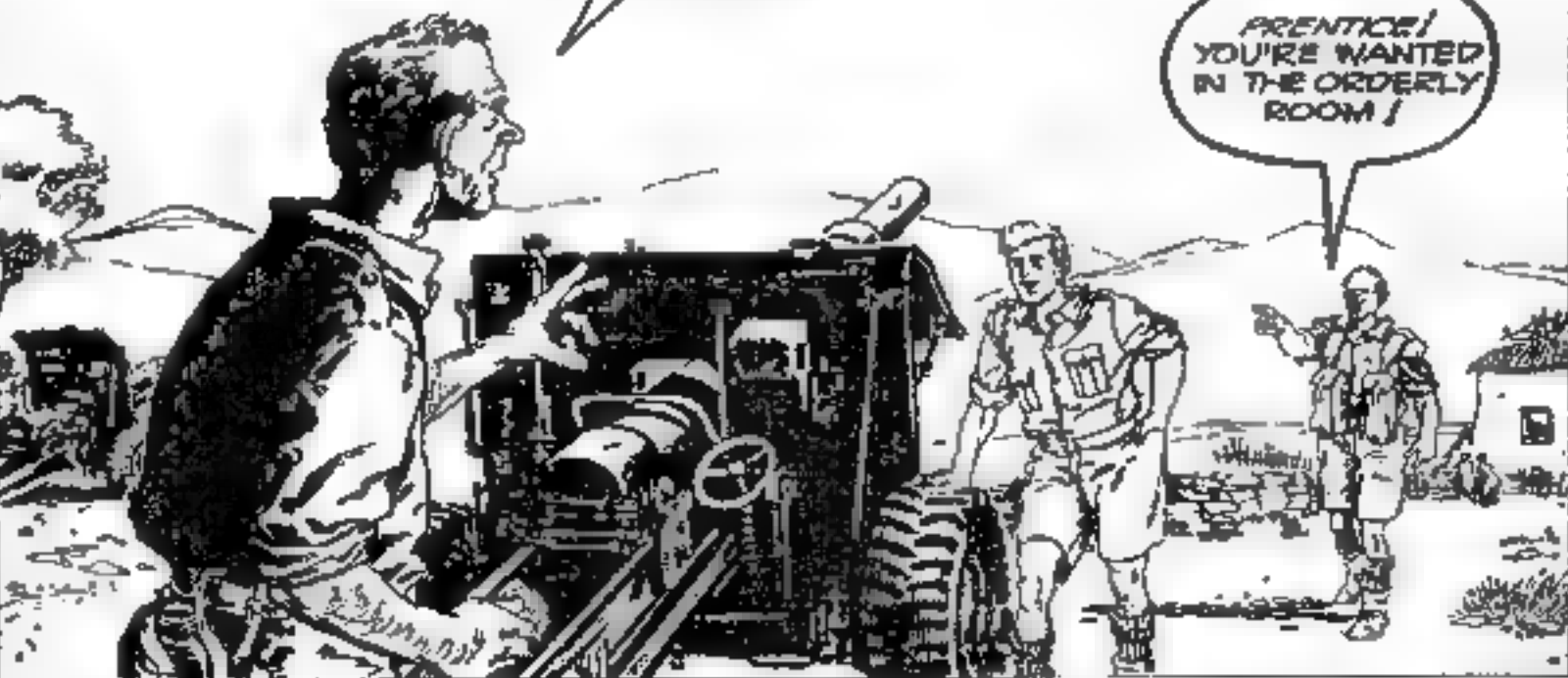
IT'S TOO LATE TO HAND IN THE MESSAGE NOW. STILL, THEY WON'T MISS ONE SMALL GROUP AT THE FRONT...



BUT TOM WAS WRONG. WHEN EVERY MAN COUNTED, AN ENTIRE PATROL WAS TOO IMPORTANT TO BE OVERLOOKED.

BEST GUN IN THE BATTERY IS OUR NELLIE. EVEN AT EXTREME RANGE SHE'S DEAD ACCURATE.

PRENTICE!
YOU'RE WANTED
IN THE ORDERLY
ROOM!



SERGEANT THORN WAS GRIM-FACED AS HE LED THE WAY TOWARDS THE FARMHOUSE...

WHAT DOES
THE OLD
MAN WANT,
SARGE?

AN OFFICER
HAS ARRIVED
FROM THE FRONT.
THE OLD MAN'S
HOLDING AN
INQUIRY YOU'LL
FIND OUT ABOUT
IT WHEN YOU
SEE HIM!



MAJOR HASLOP, THE BATTERY COMMANDER, STARED AT TOM WITH COLD, STEEL-GREY EYES...



TO LIE WAS USELESS. HE HAD ACKNOWLEDGED THE MESSAGE AND MAJOR HASLOP MUST KNOW THAT. SUDDENLY, IT WAS ALL TOO MUCH FOR THE YOUNG SIGNALLER. FACED WITH THE PROSPECT OF PUNISHMENT, HE PANICKED.



LIEUTENANT MERSHAM LUNGED FORWARD AND GRABBED TOM'S SHIRT. EYES BLAZING, HE STARED AT PRENTICE'S WHITE FACE...

THAT'S A LIE AND YOU KNOW IT! I NEVER RECEIVED THAT MESSAGE!

DON'T...
I...

LIEUTENANT,
CONTROL
YOURSELF!

TREMBLING WITH RAGE, MERSHAM RELEASED TOM. HASLOP STARED COLDLY AT THE EXCITED OFFICER...

LIEUTENANT MERSHAM, YOU ARE UNDER OPEN ARREST UNTIL YOU ARE BACK TO FACE COURT-MARTIAL FOR WILFUL DISOBEDIENCE OF AN ORDER!

BUT
I DIDN'T
RECEIVE
THAT
ORDER!



OUTSIDE, TOM STOPPED THORN AS THE SERGEANT STARTED TO WALK AWAY...

WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO HIM, SARGE?

IF HE'S FOUND GUILTY, HE'LL LOSE HIS COMMISSION, BE SENT TO PRISON, OR HE COULD EVEN BE SHOT! ARE YOU SATISFIED, YOU SNIVELLING YOUNG DRIP?



TOM FLINCHED BENEATH THE RAW CONTEMPT IN THE SERGEANT'S VOICE. LEFT ON HIS OWN, HE BEGAN TO REALISE JUST WHAT HIS HASTY, IMPULSIVE ACTION OF QUASHING THE MESSAGE HAD LED TO...

THEY GUESS I LIED, BUT THEY CAN'T PROVE IT. IF I CONFESS, THEN I'LL RUN THE SAME RISK AS MERSHAM. I MIGHT EVEN BE SHOT!



LATE THAT NIGHT, A DISPATCH RIDER ROARED INTO THE CAMP. THE BATTERY COMMANDER HELD A QUICK COUNCIL OF WAR.

THE ENEMY ARE BREAKING THROUGH AND THEIR REINFORCEMENTS ARE TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT. OUR COMBAT UNITS NEED MORE TIME BEFORE THEY CAN ENGAGE.



WHAT'S THE PLAN, SIR?

THE PLAN WAS SIMPLE. 'B' BATTERY STOOD IN THE PATH OF THE GERMAN ADVANCE - AND 'B' BATTERY WOULD BUY THE TIME THE COMBAT UNITS NEEDED

THE GERMAN REINFORCEMENTS ARE HEADING INTO RANGE OF OUR GUNS. WE'LL SEND FORWARD A STRONG ADVANCE UNIT AND SET UP AN OBSERVATION POST. WITH LUCK, WE CAN HOLD THEM.

WHAT ABOUT MERSHAM, SIR?

I STILL THINK THAT SIGNALLER WAS LYING!

HASLOP HESITATED. MERSHAM HAD THE REPUTATION OF BEING A BRAVE AND COURAGEOUS OFFICER AND THOSE QUALITIES WERE GOING TO BE IN DEMAND.

WE'LL NEED EVERY MAN - AND THIS JOB IS JUST MERSHAM'S CUP OF TEA. YES, MERSHAM CAN TAKE CHARGE OF THE O.P.



Chapter 4. *The Castle of Doom*

AT DAWN NEXT DAY, LIEUTENANT MERSHAM LED HIS PART OF THE UNIT UP TO THE FRONT, CLINGING TO A SOARING PEAK, A CRUMBLING MASS OF HAND-HEWN STONE LOOKED DOWN ON THE ROAD-CUT VALLEY BEYOND...

WE'LL SET UP OUR
OBSERVATION POST IN
THAT RUIN, TOMKINS,
YOU COME WITH ME.
THE REST OF YOU,
SCATTER!

RIGHT,
SIR!

WE MUST
BE RIGHT ON
TOP OF THE
JERRIES...



OTHERS, TOO, HAD SPOTTED
THE CASTLE. FROM THE VALLEY
BELOW, HAUPTMANN BRAUN
HAD EXAMINED THE RUIN

THAT RUIN WOULD
MAKE A GOOD
OBSERVATION POST
FOR THE ENGLANDERS.
KLAUS / TAKE A
PATROL AND
DEMOLISH IT!

JAWOHL,
HERR
HAUPTMANN!



SO IT WAS THAT, AS MERSHAM'S PATROL CROPT TOWARDS THE CASTLE, EYES GLEAMED AT THEM COLDLY OVER MENACING GUN-BARRELS...



MERCILESSLY, THE GERMANS OPENED FIRE, THEIR SHATTERING HAIL OF LEAD SMASHING INTO THE STARTLED GUNNERS...



FAR BACK DOWN THE SLOPE, TOM STIFFENED AS WORDS CRACKLED FROM HIS EARPHONES EXCITEDLY. HE CALLED TO THORN, WHO HAD BEEN LEFT IN CHARGE OF THE GROUP...

SARGE! THE LIEUTENANT'S IN TROUBLE. THEY'VE RUN INTO A JERRY PATROL AND NEED HELP!

FIVE MEN STAY ON GUARD, THE REST FOLLOW ME! AT THE DOUBLE!



AS THORN LED HIS MEN UP THE SLOPE THE SURVIVORS OF THE TRAPPED PATROL FOUGHT BACK WITH THE FURY OF DESPERATION...

UNLESS THE OTHERS GET HERE SOON, WE'VE HAD IT. DID YOU MAKE CONTACT OKAY?



THEY GOT THE MESSAGE, S R!

MERSHAM DUCKED AS THE FIRE OF A DOZEN GUNS BEARED TOWARDS HIM, WINING LEAD RICOCHETING FROM THE STONE WALL. THE SIGNALLER GAVE A CRY OF ANGUISH...



RECKLESSLY, MERSHAM SCRAMBLED DOWN TO THE LIMP FIGURE BELOW. THE SIGNALLER WAS DEAD. THE RADIO A SHATTERED MESS OF USELESS WRECKAGE...



THE SNARL OF GUNFIRE DIED AS THE VICTORIOUS GERMANS RAN FORWARD ONE OF THEM, LOADED WITH EXPLOSIVES HEADED FOR THE RUIN ...

WAIT, FOOL! THERE
ARE ENGLANDERS
INSIDE! FELDWEBEL!
THROW SOME
GRENADES!

JAHOE,
HERR
LEUTNANT!



SNATCHING A GRENADE FROM HIS BELT, THE FELDWEBEL
SWUNG BACK HIS ARM FOR THE THROW. A RIFLE
CRACKED VICIOUSLY FROM THE EDGE OF THE CLEARING.



THORN DUCKED AS THE GRENADE EXPLODED, THEN LED THE RUSH FORWARD. FRANTICALLY, THE GERMANS TRIED TO SMASH BACK THE BRITISH COUNTER-ATTACK.

ACHTUNG!
COMBAT
POSITIONS!
SCHNELL!



WITH BRUTE FORCE, THE GUNNERS PRESSED HOME THEIR CHARGE...

GIVE IT
'EM,
LADS!



ONLY ONE GERMAN MANAGED TO ESCAPE TO THE CASTLE LOADED WITH EXPLOSIVES. HE STILL HOPED TO COMPLETE HIS MISSION. BUT MERSHAM CAUGHT UP WITH HIM...

TOO BAD,
JERRY, YOU
ALMOST
MADE IT!

AGH!



STEPPING OVER THE BODY, MERSHAM WENT TO FIND THORN. EYES BLEAK, HE LISTENED AS THE SERGEANT RASPED HIS REPORT...

WE'VE BEEN BADLY MAULED, SIR.
ANOTHER JERRY PATROL LIKE THAT
ONE WILL FINISH US OFF. SHOULD
WE PICK A DIFFERENT OP?

WE HAVEN'T
THE TIME.
JERRY IS TOO
CLOSE FOR
COMFORT.



WE'LL
USE THE
JEEP RADIO
EQUIPMENT FOR
DIRECT CONTACT
AND SET UP
THE OBSERVATION
POST IN THE
CASTLE
TURRET.

RIGHT,
SIR. YOU'LL
NEED THE
SIGNALLER, OF
COURSE.

BACK AT THE RADIO-JEEP, TOM PRENTICE
SUPERVISED THE REMOVAL OF THE
HEAVY EQUIPMENT AND FUSSED OVER
IT AS SWEATING GUNNERS LUGGED IT
UP THE STEEP SLOPE...

WATCH
WHAT YOU'RE
DOING THERE!
THAT RADIO'S
DELICATE.

WHY
DON'T YOU
BELT
UP!

FROM THE TOP OF THE CASTLE TURRET, A CLEAR VIEW COULD BE SEEN OF THE VALLEY
BELOW GRIMLY. MERSHAM STUDIED IT, AS TOM SET UP THE RADIO...

THEIR
HEAVY ARMOUR
IS JUST ENTERING
THE FAR END OF
THE VALLEY. HAVE
YOU FINISHED,
SIGNALLER?

ALMOST,
SIR. I'M
JUST
WAITING
FOR AN
ANSWER.

MERSHAM TURNED AS TOM ESTABLISHED CONTACT WITH HEADQUARTERS FACE SET, EYES COLD, HE STARED AT THE YOUNG SIGNALLER...



YOU LOOK SCARED, PRENTICE. SOMETHING ON YOUR MIND? A MESSAGE YOU FORGOT TO DELIVER, PERHAPS?

I CAN EXPLAIN ABOUT THAT, SIR. I'LL TELL THEM THE TRUTH, I SWEAR IT...

CURTLY, THE OFFICER CUT SHORT THE SIGNALLER VOICE HARD. HE RAPPED A SERIES OF ORDERS WHICH HIT TOM LIKE A FIST IN THE FACE...



THERE IS A DEAD GERMAN, BELOW TELL SERGEANT THORN TO TAKE THE DEMOLITION CHARGES HE WILL FIND ON THE BODY AND USE THEM TO SEAL OFF THIS TURRET. THEN YOU ARE ALL TO MOVE BACK!

BUT YOU'LL BE LEFT HERE ALONE, SIR! THE GERMANS WILL KNOW THIS IS AN O.P. YOU'LL BE KILLED!

MERSHAM ENARLED HIS IMPATIENCE AS HE EXPLAINED IT WAS BETTER FOR ONE MAN TO DIE THAN AN ENTIRE PATROL. SEALED BY RUBBLE THE TURRET WOULD BE A STRONG DEFENCE AGAINST A GERMAN ATTACK...

BUT YOU'LL
NEED ME
WITH YOU,
SIR, I'M THE
SIGNALLER...

I DON'T
WANT YOU,
PRENTICE I
CAN'T TRUST
YOU NOW GET
OUT AND
OBEY MY
ORDERS!



THE NAKED CONTEMPT IN MERSHAM'S VOICE STUNG TOM LIKE A WH PLASH BUT SUDDENLY, TOM KNEW WHAT HE HAD TO DO...

UGH!



SORRY,
SIR, BUT
MANNING THE
OBSERVATION POST
WILL BE TOO
RISKY I CAN'T
LET YOU GO UP
THERE - I'LL
TAKE YOUR
PLACE!

SETTING THE CHARGES OUTSIDE THE CASTLE, TOM CALLED THE SERGEANT, THEN DUCKED BACK IN THE TURRET AS THORN RAN INTO THE COURTYARD. BLANKLY HE LISTENED TO THE SIGNALLER.



THORN STEPPED FORWARD, THEN JERKED TO A HALT AS TOM LIT THE FUSE, SWEEPING UP THE OFFICER IN HIS BRAWNY ARMS. HE RACED FROM THE COURTYARD...



UP IN THE TURRET, TOM STARED AT THE SHAPES OF THE ENEMY IN THE VALLEY BELOW. CAREFULLY, HE CHECKED HIS MAP REFERENCES...

B-FOR-BAKER
CALLING A-FOR-
ABLE FIRE RANGING
SHOT REFERENCE
THREE-SIX,
FIVE-ONE.

A FOUNTAIN OF DIRT AND FLAME FLOWERED IN THE VALLEY. GRIMLY, TOM CALLED CORRECTIONS AS THE GERMANS BELOW BEGAN TO SCATTER...

LEFT TWO
HUNDRED AND
UP THREE
HUNDRED
FIRE, ONE
TROOP!

IF I'VE
GUESSED
RIGHT, THOSE
SHELLS SHOULD
LAND JUST
WHERE THE
JERRIES ARE
RUNNING.

FOUR GUNS FLUNG THEIR SHELLS INTO THE SKY AS TOM TENSELY COUNTED THE SECONDS. THEN THE SCREAMING WHINE OF FALLING PROJECTILES ENDED IN ROARING CHAOS...

NEIN!
NEIN!

THEY
HAVE THE
RANGE TO A
METRE!

GRIM-FACED HAUPTMANN BRAUN GLARED AT THE RUINED CASTLE. HARSHLY, HE BARKED ORDERS TO HIS DEMORALISED TROOPS

WHAT IS KLAUS
THINKING OF?
HE SHOULD HAVE
TAKEN THAT
POSITION BY NOW.
TAKE A PATROL
AND SEE TO IT,
FELDWEBEL!

JAWOHL,
HERR
HAUPTMANN!

BUT IT WAS A LONG WAY TO THE CASTLE, MOST OF IT OVER OPEN COUNTRY, AND TOM HAD ESTIMATED THE RANGE ACCURATELY. THE GERMAN PATROL WERE CAUGHT BY SHELLFIRE WITHOUT A CHANCE OF GETTING UNDER COVER...



GRINDING INTO THE VALLEY, THE GERMAN ARMOUR WAS THE MAIN STRENGTH OF THE ATTACK. WITH IT, THEY COULD SMASH THE ALLIED DEFENCE AND PUNCH A HOLE TO THE ALLIED REAR...

AT LAST!
SOME FLAT
COUNTRY NOW
WE CAN
MOVE!

ORDER
TO ALL UNITS.
SCATTER ON
ENTERING THE
VALLEY THE AREA
IS UNDER ENEMY
FIRE!



PERCHED HIGH IN THE TURRET, TOM STARED THROUGH NARROWED EYES AT THE DISTANT DUST OF THE ENEMY TANKS...

FIRE ONE RANGING SHOT FIVE HUNDRED YARDS SHORT OF EXTREME RANGE ON REFERENCE SIX.

I'VE GOT TO FOOL THOSE JERRIES SOMEHOW!

SMOKE AND FLAME SOARED FROM A POINT WELL IN FRONT OF THE COLUMN THEN, OTHER RANGING SHOTS EXPLODED HARMLESSLY AHEAD...

THEIR GUNS CANNOT REACH US YET, HERR HAUPTMANN!

IT WILL BE EASIER TO SCATTER WHEN WE ARE DEEPER IN THE VALLEY DO SO WHEN WE REACH THE LIMIT OF THEIR RANGE.

CONFIDENTLY, THE GERMANS PRESSED FORWARD AS TOM, COUNTING THE SECONDS, RAPPED ORDERS TO THE Distant BATTERY...

FIRE IN TEN SECONDS, EXTREME RANGE, THE SAME REFERENCE AS BEFORE GIVE IT ALL YOU'VE GOT!

RIGHT, FIRING IN SEVEN SECONDS.

STEEL AND EXPLOSIVE SEARED THE SKY AS THE BRITISH SALVOES CRASHED DOWN ON THE GERMAN ARMOUR, THE VERY GROUND SHUDDERING TO THE SAVAGE FURY OF THE DISTANT GUNS...

THE ENGLANDERS
HAVE TRICKED US!
SCATTER, YOU
FOOLS!

THEIR
OBSERVATION
POST IS IN
THAT CASTLE.
DESTROY
IT!

TENSE WITH STRAIN, TOM WATCHED THE GERMAN ARMOUR SCATTER AND HEAD TOWARDS HIM. TIME, HE KNEW, WAS RUNNING OUT FOR HIM.

THEY'RE
GETTING TOO
CLOSE BUT THEY'RE
TOO SCATTERED TO
MAKE AN EASY
TARGET.

EVERY GERMAN IN THE VALLEY KNEW THE DANGER LURKING IN THE CASTLE AND EVERY GUNNER CONCENTRATED ON THE TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF THE ANCIENT BUILDING...

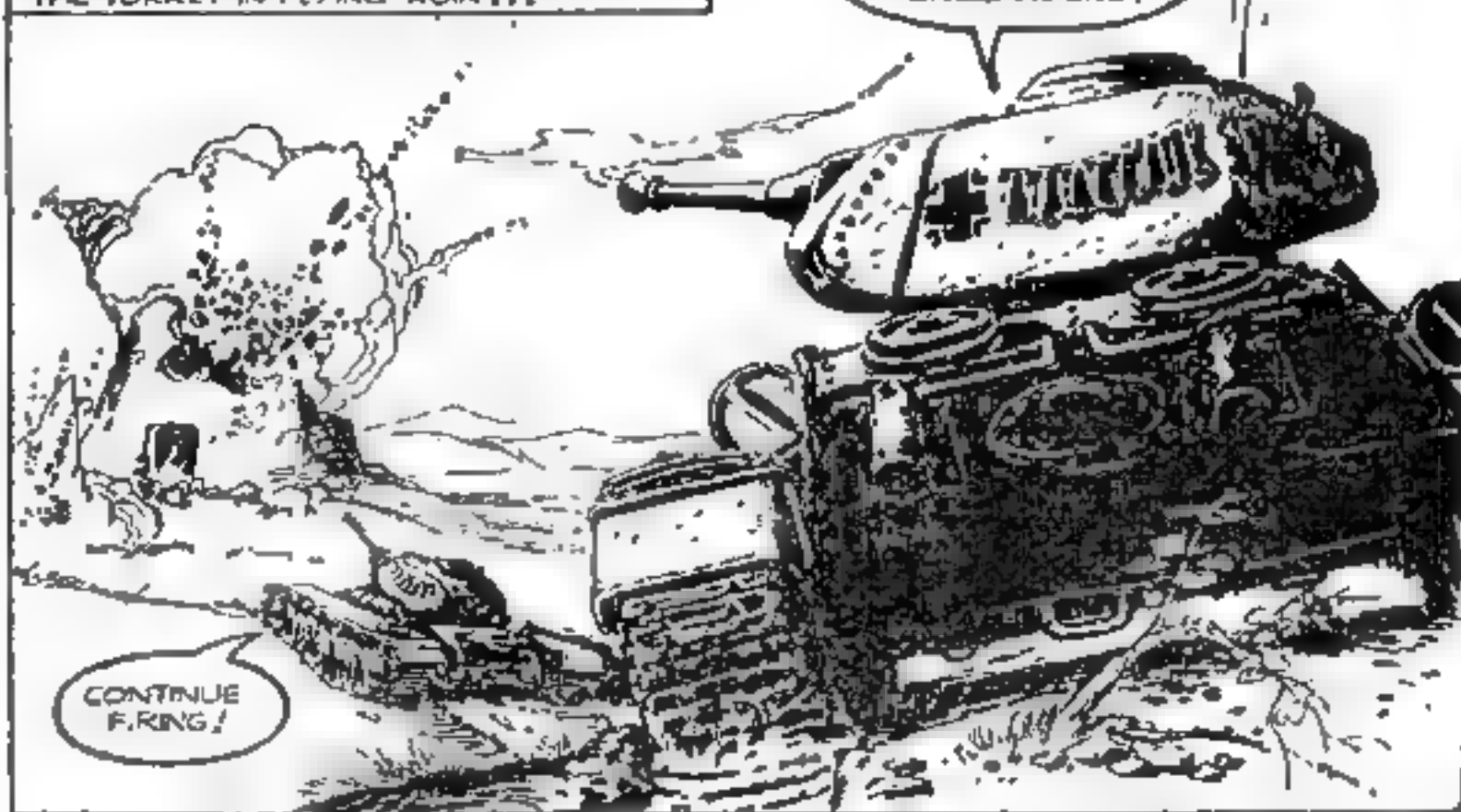
ELEVATE,
FOOL-
HISHER!

WE MUST GET CLOSER,
HERE HAUPTMANN THE
TARGET IS TOO HIGH FOR
OUR ELEVATION!



LIKE A HORDE OF HUNGRY WOLVES THE GERMAN ARMOUR CLOSED IN ON THE TARGET A 75mm SHELL SENT THE TOP OF THE TURRET IN FLYING RUIN...

GOOD SHOOTING,
ERNST / THAT SHOULD
TAKE CARE OF THE
ENGLANDERS!



CONTINUE
FIRING!

AS THE SHELL RIPPED THE TURRET, TOM DESPERATELY PLUNG HIMSELF OVER HIS EQUIPMENT, TRYING TO PROTECT THE PRECIOUS RADIO WITH HIS BODY...

THEY'VE GOT ME! THERE'S NO WAY OUT NOW. BUT IF IT'S THE END FOR ME, I'LL TAKE SOME OF THEM WITH ME!

AS SHELLS CRASHED INTO THE CASTLE, TOM GAVE HIS LAST ORDER TO THE BATTERY. WEAKLY, HE ORDERED FULL SALVOES, CUTTING SHORT THE STARTLED OBJECTION...

THAT REFERENCE IS SPOT ON THE CASTLE. IF WE FIRE, YOU'LL BE BLOWN SKY-HIGH!

DON'T ARGUE YOU HEARD WHAT I SAID. START FIRING!

WITHIN SECONDS THE AREA AT THE FOOT OF THE CASTLE BECAME A RAGING INFERNO, AS SHELLS DROPPED FROM THE SKIES IN A RAIN OF DESTRUCTION...



SAFE FROM THE HOLOCAUST, LIEUTENANT MERSHAM GROANED AS HE OPENED HIS EYES, DAZEDLY, HE STARED AT THE ANXIOUS FACE ABOVE HIM ...

YOU BLIPPED
AND HIT YOUR
HEAD, SIR PRENTICE
TOOK YOUR PLACE
HE TOLD ME TO
TELL YOU THERE'S
A NOTE IN YOUR
POCKET EXPLAINING
EVERYTHING.

WHAT HAS
HAPPENED?
WHERE
AM I?



MERSHAM READ THE NOTE. IT WAS A FULL CONFESSION OF TOM'S LIES ABOUT THE MISSING MESSAGE. GRIMLY, MERSHAM CLIMBED TO HIS FEET.

THE YOUNG
FOOL'S TRYING
TO SQUARE THINGS.
WE'VE GOT TO GET
BACK THERE
AND HELP
HIM OUT!

IT'S TOO
LATE FOR
THAT, SIR
THE GUNS
HAVE
STOPPED!



BOTH MEN KNEW WHAT THE UNCANNY SILENCE MUST MEAN. EITHER THE GERMANS HAD DESTROYED THE OBSERVATION POST OR THEY THEMSELVES HAD BEEN WIPED OUT. THORN SOON FOUND OUT...

JERRY'S SMASHED TO SCRAP-IRON, SIR! THEY WON'T BREAK THROUGH WITH THE WRECKS THEY'VE GOT!

BUT WHAT ABOUT PRENTICE?



TOM WAS DEAD, TRAPPED AND CRUSHED BENEATH TONS OF STONE, KILLED BY THE VERY SHELLS HE HAD CALLED DOWN ON THE ENEMY, KNOWING THE PRICE HE WOULD HAVE TO PAY.

HE WAS AN ODD ONE, SERGEANT. I NEVER REALLY UNDERSTOOD HIM. YET HE DIED LIKE A HERO. WHAT MADE HIM PREPARED TO SACRIFICE HIMSELF?

HE WAS A GUNNER, SIR...



TO SERGEANT THORN, THAT WAS EXPLANATION ENOUGH. BUT MERSHAM FELT THERE WAS MORE TO IT. YOUNG TOM PRENTICE HAD, IN THE END, FOUND WHAT HE WAS LOOKING FOR...



THE BOY WHO HAD ALWAYS ADMIRER BRAVERY, STRENGTH, AND FORTITUDE HAD FINALLY FOUND THOSE QUALITIES IN HIMSELF!

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